

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 3090

EXDIS

LIMA PASS DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY MCNEIL

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: DAS MCNEIL CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT POVEDA RE
RETORNO PROCESS

REF: STATE 114311

1. PRESIDENT POVEDA INVITED ARA DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRANK MCNEIL AND ME FOR TWO HOR PRIVATE CONVERSATION AT SALINAS NAVAL BASE. POVEDA INITIATED DISCUSSION OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE, WHICH OCCUPIED MOST OF OUR TALK. SEPTELS SENT ON PORTIONS DEALING WITH NARCOTICS AND ECUADOR/PERU BOUNDARY PROBLEMS.
2. POVEDA WELCOMED THE CHANCE TO DISCUSS THE POLITICAL SITUATION WITH MCNEIL. POVEDA SAID THAT HE HAS BEEN PLEASED WITH US DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT ANY SYMPATHY FOR THE RETURN PROCESS, WHICH, HE AVERRED, WAS GOING STRICTLY ACCORDING TO PLAN DESPITE THE FEARS AND DOUBTS OF MANY. THERE WERE THOSE WHO HAD ACCUSED THE ARMED FORCES OF ATTEMPTING TO PROMOTE ANARCHY AND SABOTAGE THE PROCESS BECAUSE OF CERTAIN
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THINGS WHICH HAD OCCURRED IN THE PROCESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS. POVEDA REJECTED THIS, EMPHASIZING THAT THE MILITARY WAS LEAVGFG POWER OF ITS OWN FREE WILL, AND REMARKING THAT EVERYTHING THAT HAD BEEN PROMISED WAS BEING FULFILLED.

3. POVEDA STRESSED THAT THE MILITARY HAD CERTAIN PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES IN MIND. THESE HAD BEEN DERIVED FROM THE

ECUADOREAN EXPERIENCE THAT CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT HAD FAILED BECAUSE OF THE WEAKNESS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT DEMOCRACY COULD ONLY BE PERMANENTLY GUARANTEED THROUGH THE PRESENCE OF POLITICAL COMPETITION BASED UPON STRONG, DISCIPLINED, AND WELL-ORGANIZED PARTIES WHICH ACCOMMODATED THE BROADEST SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC OPINION. THE ULTIMATE PRACTICAL GOAL, HE DECLARED, WAS TO PREVENT FUTURE MILITARY INTERVENTION AND KEEP THE ARMED FORCES IN THE BARRACKS. IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, THE POLITICAL PARTIES MUST WIN THE RESPECT OF THE ARMED FORCES AND THIS COULD ONLY BE DONE THROUGH ESTABLISHING THE MORAL PRESTIGE AND LEGITIMACY OF THE PARTIES. HE ASKED THAT THE ARMED FORCES INVOLVEMENT IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS BE UNDERSTOOD IN THIS LIGHT.

4. FOR THIS REASON, POVEDA CONTINUED, THE ARMED FORCES HAD EARLY REJECTED THE IDEA OF CONVOKING A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, WHICH, HE ARGUED, WOULD JUST HAVE LED POLITICS BACK TO WHERE THEY WERE BEFORE. THE ARMED FORCES WOULD REFUSE TO RETURN POWER TO THE CORRUPT SYSTEM OF THE PAST WHERE SUCH ASSEMBLIES WERE BOUGHT AND SOLD. THE CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTING COMMISSIONS WERE FORMED AND WERE GRANTED ABSOLUTELY FREE DISCUSSION. THE MODIFICATIONS THAT THE MILITARY HAS MADE IN THE COMMISSIONS' RESULTS HAVE BEEN --- WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE BUCARAM EXCLUSION --- MINOR AND DESIGNED TO PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE ARMED FORCES' CONFIDENTIAL

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GOALS. POVEDA SAID THAT THE PROCESS HAD SURVIVED A STRONG CHALLENGE IN THE REFERENDUM, WHICH HE ATTRIBUTED TO ECONOMIC PRESSURE GROUPS WHO FEARED THE UNKNOWN. THESE PEOPLE WANTED TO GO BACK TO THE OLD SYSTEM WHICH PRESERVED THEIR LEVERAGE, OR MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT. THEY WERE ESPECIALLY FEARFUL OF THE MORE PROGRESSIVE NEW CONSTITUTION WHICH GRANTED THE GOVERNMENT WIDER DISCRETION IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AREA, AND ALSO OF THE TRANSITORY PERIOD WHEN THE PRESIDENT WOULD HAVE NEAR DICTATORIAL POWERS. AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, THE BUCARAM CANDIDACY HAD INCREASED THE ANXIETY THAT STEMMED FROM THESE CONSIDERATIONS AND HAD TO BE DEALT WITH TO PRESERVE THE PROCESS. ALTHOUGH POVEDA SAID THAT THERE WERE LEGITIMATE ABSTRACT ISSUES ABOUT THE NATIONALITY OF PRESIDENTS AND THEIR CAPACITY TO GOVERN, HE ADMITTED THAT THE CLAUSE WHICH THE MILITARY INTERPOSED REGARDING PRESIDENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS WAS DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY AGAINST BUCARAM.

5. PROJECTING FROM THE PRESENT SITUATION, POVEDA STATED UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT THERE WOULD BE FREE ELECTIONS ON JULY 16. FOLLOWING THIRTY DAYS OR SO TO ENTERTAIN CHALLENGES, THE RUNOFF CAMPAIGN WOULD COMMENCE, AND HE

FORESAW THE SECOND ROUND ELECTION TAKING PLACE IN LATE SEPTEMBER OR EARLY OCTOBER. ALLOWING A MONTH MORE FOR COUNTING AND CERTIFICATION, PLUS A TRANSITION PERIOD, HE SAID THAT THE NEW PRESIDENT WOULD BE INAUGURATED AROUND DECEMBER 6. AT ANY RATE, THE MILITARY WOULD BE GONE BY THE END OF THE YEAR. POVEDA DECLARED THAT THE COMPLETION OF THE PROCESS WOULD GIVE HIM GREAT PERSONAL SATISFACTION, BECAUSE HE HAS NEVER ENTERTAINED ANY ALTERNATIVES. THERE ARE THOSE WHO STILL WANT THE MILITARY TO STAY, BUT HE ESTIMATED THAT THE DEPOLITICIZATION OF THE ARMED FORCES HAS BEEN ABOUT 70 PERCENT SUCCESSFUL AT THIS POINT AND GENUINE INTERNAL RESISTANCE HAS ALL BUT DRIED UP. HE OBSERVED THAT THE MILITARY'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS WAS NOT HEALTHY AND HIS AIM WAS TO PREVENT A SITUATION OCCURRING

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IN ECUADOR, AS IN ARGENTINA, WHEREIN A GENERAL, AFTER READING HIS MORNING PAPER ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT' LATEST DIFFICULTIES, OBSERVES HIS BRAIDED AND BERIBBONED IMAGE IN THE MIRROR AND SAYS, "WHY NOT YOU?".

6. POVEDA DENIED THAT THE MILITARY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DOWNFALL OF THE FRANCISCO HUERTA MONTALVO CANDIDACY. HUERTA MONTALVO HAD BROUGHT IT ON HIMSELF, AND THOUGH HE HAD BEEN AN OPPONENT OF THE MILITARY, HIS DISQUALIFICATION WAS BASED ON HIS PROBLEMS WITH FEDESARROLLO. POVEDA OBSERVED, HOWEVER, THAT IN NOMINATING HUERTA MONTALVO, THE LIBERAL PARTY HAD BEEN THROWING AWAY A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE THE PRESIDENCY WITH ANOTHER CANDIDATE. HE SAID THAT IT LOOKED LIKE RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RENDON WOULD REPLACE HIS NEPHEW AND HE WAS PLEASED TO NOTE THAT THE ELDER HUERTA WAS STRAIGHT-FORWARD, MATURE, AND DECENT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 3090

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LIMA PASS DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY MCNEIL

7. MCNCIL SAID THAT THE US HAS UNDERSTOOD THE DIFFICULTIES THE GOE FACED IN CARRYING OUT THE PROCESS AND RESPECTED POVEDA FOR HIS COURAGE AND INTELLIGENCE. VISIBLY PLEASED WITH THE REMARK, POVEDA SAID THAT SOMETIMES HE FELT LIKE A TIGHTROPE WALKER IN ATTEMPTING TO MAINTAIN A CONDUCTIVE POLITICAL AND PUBLIC ORDER ATMOSPHERE FOR THE PROCESS WITHOUT BEING REPRESSIVE. HE WAS PROUD THAT THE GOE HAD APPLIED ONLY A MINIMUM AMOUNT OF PRESSURE TO DEAL WITH PROVOCATIONS AND CHALLENGES. THE GOE, AT THE SAME TIME, HAD ACTED OUT OF A SENSE OF SELF-SACRIFICE TO PUT DIFFICULT PROBLEMS IN ORDER BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE CIVILIANS. HE POINTED TO THE BUS FARE INCREASE, THE NEW HYDROCARBONS LAW, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INCREASE THE PROCE OF GASOLINE AS EXAMPLES.

8. POVEDA FORESAW A FINAL ELECTORAL CONTEST BETWEEN HUERTA RENDON AND SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN WITH HUERTA RENDON WINNING OUT. HE DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A MODERATE SOCIAL-DEMOCRAT, WHO HAD A STRONG PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH DURAN-BALLEN, BUT WHO LEANED TOWARD HUERTA RENDON ON IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS. DESPITE THE ARITHMETIC OF THE LEVT VS RIGHT AMONG THE ELECTORATE, HE THOUGHT THAT
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DURAN-BALLEN MIGHT WIN BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO, UNLIKE HIM, WOULD PUT GREATER EMPHASIS ON THE PERSONAL AND LESS ON THE IDEOLOGICAL. POVEDA SAW RODRIGO BORJA OF DEMOCRATIC LEFT FINISHING THIRD, FOLLOWED BY JAIME ROLDOS OF CFP. POVEDA CHARACTERIZED DEMOCRATIC LEFT AS THE BEST ORGANIZED PARTY AND BORJA AS THE CANDIDATE WHO HAD A FACILITY OF UNCERSTANDING AND PRESENTING THE ISSUES ATTRACTIVELY. HE SAID THAT CFP WAS ORGANIZED TOO, BUT DID NOT THINK MUCH OF ROLDOS' CHANCES. HE DID NOT THINK HOWEVER THAT TOLDOS WOULD BE BUCARAM'S STOOGUE.

9. MCNEIL REVIEWED, PER INSTRUCTIONS IN REFTTEL, OUR APPRECIATION OF ECUADOR'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD, OUR SUPPORT FOR ECUADOR'S RETURN TO DEMOCRACY, AND OUR CONCERN THAT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS MIGHT LEAD TO A DISCREDITING OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS BY EFFECTIVELY DISENFRANCHISING MAJOR POLITICAL

SECTORS. AS PRESIDENT POVEDA KNEW, WE HAD NO INTENTION OF PRESCRIBING POLITICAL FORMULAS, MUCH LESS OF SUPPORTING ANY CANDIDATE; OUR CONCERN WAS LIMITED TO THE HEALTH OF THE PROCESS. WE WOULD NOT PRESUME TO ADDRESS THE LEGALITIES, BUT THE REPORTED DISQUALIFICATION OF SEVERAL CANDIDATES AND RUMORED WITHDRAWAL OF ANOTHER BECAUSE OF THESE MANEUVERINGS RAISED THE CONCERN THAT SUBSTANTIAL SECTORS MIGHT BE EFFECTIVELY DENIED PARTICIPATION, THEREBY DAMAGING THE CREDIBILITY OF THE PROCESS. WE HAD MADE SPECIAL EFFORTS, E.G., RENEWED ACCESS TO IBD SOFT WINDOW, MILITARY PURCHASES, TO BE RESPONSIVE TO ECUADOR'S NEEDS IN SUPPORT OF HER HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD AND HER RETURN TO DEMOCRACY. IF THE PROCESS FAILED, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY THE CONTINUANCE OF THESE SPECIAL EFFORTS.

10. POVEDA REPLIED THAT THE USG CONCERNS ABOUT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS HAD ALSO BEEN SHARED BY THE GOE AND FOR THAT REASON THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOE HAD FOUND WAYS TO RELAX THE POLITICAL PARTY ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS. HE MENTIONED THAT CAMILO MENA MAY BE UNLIKELY TO QUALIFY EVEN UNDER THESE NEW STANDARDS, WHICH HE LAMENTED WAS DISADVANTAGEOUS TO THE GOVERNMENT. CHARGING DURAN-BALLEN WITH RESORTING TO POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY IN DENOUNCING THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (SET), HE PREDICTED THAT THE SOURCE OF HIS COMPLAINT --- THE QUALIFICATION OF THE SMALL POPULAR PATRIOTIC PARTY BELONGING TO THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONALIST FRONT COALITION --- WAS BEING RESOLVED. POVEDA MADE NO SPECIFIC COMMENT REGARDING THE THREAT TO JAIME ROLDOS' RUNNING MATE, OSVALDO HURTADO OF POPULAR DEMOCRACY.

1. MCNEIL DELIVERED THE MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CARTER ACKNOWLEDGING POVEDA'S CONGRATULATORY REMARKS ON THE CANAL TREATY RATIFICATION AND EXPRESSING SATISFACTION THAT ECUADOR'S RETURN TO A COMPLETELY DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT WAS PROCEEDING ON SCHEDULE. POVEDA SEEMED QUITE PLEASED WITH THE LETTER AND SAID IT WAS "USEFUL."

12. COMMENT: POVEDA WAS AT HIS BEST: OPEN AND ARTICULATE, FULLY COMPREHENDING OUR CONCERNS AND SPEAKING TO THEM FRANKLY AND PERSUASIVELY. HAD THIS CONVERSATION BEEN THE ONLY POLITICAL EVENT OF THE DAY, WE WOULD HAVE CONCLUDED THAT ECUADOR'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION WOULD WEATHER ITS LATEST CRISIS A BIT SCARRED, BUT INTACT. HOWEVER, POVEDA'S REMARKS ON BRINGING THE SET IN LINE HAD CARRIED THE IMPLICATION THAT THEY WOULD NOT MOVE AGAINST THE ROLDOS/HURTADO/BUCARAM SECTOR. THEREFORE, THE NEWS SUBSEQUENTLY ON THE SAME DAY THAT THE HURTADO PARTY HAD STILL NOT BEEN ABLE TO QUALIFY WITH THE SET DESPITE THE GENERAL EXPECTATION THAT IT WOULD, WAS

DISTURBING. PERHAPS MORE THAN THE DISQUALIFICATION OF
PANCHO HUERTA, WHICH COULD BE ATTRIBUTED IN THE FINAL
ANALYSIS TO DIRTY DEEDS COMMITTED BY CIVILIANS RATHER
THAN MILITARY, THE HURTADO PROBLEM WOULD APPEAR TO MANY TO
BE PRIMARILY THE WORK OF BEHIND THE SCENES GOVERNMENT
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MANIPULATION. NOR WERE WE FURTHER ENCOURAGED BY THE
CONVERSATIONS THAT WERE HELD THAT SAME NIGHT WITH MINISTER
OF DEFENSE ARRATA, FOREIGN MINISTER AYALA AND ASSORTED
FONOFF OFFICIALS IN WHICH THEY SOUGHT TO JUSTIFY THE VARIOUS
ACTS OF THE SET (QUOTO 2049). ARRATA'S PRIVATE ASSURANCES
ON MAY 7 INDICATING THAT HURTADO MIGHT BE APPROVED
LATER IN THE WEEK, HOWEVER, SEEMED TO ECHO THE TENOR OF
POVEDA'S REMARKS AND WERE ENCOURAGING. THE EVENTS OF THE
PAST WEEK, ESPECIALLY THE LAST WEEKEND, TESTIFY TO THE
COMPLEXITY AND PERHAPS FRAGILITY OF THE RETURN PROCESS.
THEY ALSO BEAR WITNESS TO THE DELICACY AND IMPORTANCE
OF OUR OWN ROLE. IF WE GO TOO FAR, WE MAY RISK AN INDIGNANT
REACTION. BUT IF WE DO NOT CONTINUE TO EXPRESS OUR CON-
CERN WHEN WARRANTED, WE COULD INADVERTENTLY GIVE
SUPPORT TO A PROCESS IN DANGER OF LOSING CREDIBILITY.
THROUGH OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE HIGHEST GOE OFFICIALS IN
THE PAST FEW DAYS, WE HAVE SOUGHT TO STRIKE A PROPER
BALANCE. (THIS CABLE WAS CLEARED IN DRAFT WITH DAS MCNEIL).
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